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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [SA](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: SAUDI CONSERVATIVES CALL FOR BOYCOTT ON US  
PRODUCTS IN RESPONSE TO LEBANON CRISIS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Beginning July 31, two prominent conservative websites posted articles calling for a boycott on U.S. consumer goods and services, ranging from fast-food franchises to shampoo brands, to begin on August 4. There was already an ongoing cellular telephone text messaging campaign. The potential effectiveness of the boycott has been widely debated on the websites. This call for a boycott is the first in Saudi Arabia on U.S. products since the 2003 Iraq invasion, and follows a 2005 successful boycott on Danish products. The Saudi economy is too dependent on U.S. consumer goods for the boycott to be popular amongst the Saudi populace, but its initiation may suggest the Saudi public's increasing displeasure with the U.S.'s foreign policy towards the Lebanon crisis. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On July 31, the conservative website "Islam Online" posted an article reporting an SMS cell phone text messaging campaign calling for the boycott of U.S. products to protest perceived U.S. inaction on the Lebanon crisis. The SMS texts used emotional rhetoric to support their campaign. One of the messages stated, "with every Riyal (with which) you purchase American products there is a bullet in the heart of a Lebanese and a Palestinian." In the article, Saleh Al-Rubai'an, Professor of Journalism at the Call and Media College, King Saud University, commented that the boycott will be an "effective weapon that forces nations to take the Islamic states into consideration." Also, the boycott campaign urged people to support their local economy, by buying Saudi products and effectively boycotting American goods and services.

¶3. (U) The conservative Al-Sahat website also posted this article, which generated a robust online debate about the effectiveness of an anti-U.S. U.S. boycott. One of these postings stated, "One would get good credit from God if one boycotted American and Israeli products as these nations are killing Muslims, and it is one way of supporting our Muslim brothers." Another posting commented that boycotting American products had proved difficult in the past and suggested pursuing a boycott of the U.S. dollar in favor of the Yen or Euro.

¶4. (SBU) On August 4, al-Sahat posted a list of specific U.S. goods and establishments to boycott including: Nesquick, Coca Cola, Nike Sportswear, Lays Potato Products, Pampers, Proctor & Gamble products, Pert Plus, Head and Shoulders, Pantene, Starbucks Coffee, Pizza Hut, Baskin Robbins, Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald's, Hardees and Burger King. PolOff and EconOff visited several restaurants on the list as well as supermarkets that stock the listed American products. All the establishments were fully stocked with the items recommended to be boycotted. Indeed, many stores were having front aisle sales on these items. There were no leaflets

posted on the bulletin boards at the entrance of the stores, and there were no indications that the boycott was affecting business. In one Baskin Robbins, the store clerk stated that business had been normal. (Note: the stores and restaurants visited by Emboffs were not located in neighborhoods known to be extremely conservative, where customers would be more likely to be influenced by calls for a boycott. End Note).

15. (C) COMMENT: The boycott campaign on U.S. goods and establishments seems unlikely to be successful for both economic and political reasons. Economically, such a boycott would hurt Saudi businesses, since U.S. consumer outlets and franchises in the Kingdom rely on the local Saudi economy and market for raw materials and supplies. In political terms, this boycott is in contrast to the recent boycott on Danish products, since this one remains to date in the domain of the Saudi conservatives and not the mainstream populace. Additionally, the current Saudi mood on the Lebanon crisis remains divided. Nevertheless, this campaign reflects the continuing trend of the Saudi public's growing displeasure with U.S. foreign policy in the region. END COMMENT.  
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